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RUEHKG/AMEMBASSY KINSHASA 0637  
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TAGS: PREL MOPS PINS PGOV RW  
SUBJECT: DRC-GOR JOINT OPERATION SCORES SUCCESS, IS EXTENDED

REF: A. KINSHASA 98  
B. KIGALI 57 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Ambassador Symington, reason 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Senior Rwandans report that President Kabila has asked Government of Rwanda (GOR) troops to remain in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) until February 28. A senior Rwanda Defense Force (RDF) officer asked if the U.S. had agreed with Kabila's request to place U.S. military observers in the Joint Operation Command (JOC) in Goma. We replied that we would relay that question. The bilateral four-plus-four talks between the GOR and the GRDC are taking place today in Gisenyi, Rwanda. The Congolese request that RDF troops remain in North Kivu until late February was not unexpected; it reflects progress on the ground and increases the prospect that the joint operation will make additional gains benefiting both countries. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On February 5, Major General Patrick Nyamvumba (J4 Logistics) told DCM that DRC President Kabila extended "Phase One" of the joint Congolese Army (FARDC) and RDF joint operation in North Kivu until February 28. (Note: Up to the time he received confirmation of the extension, Nyamvumba said he had been preparing to withdraw RDF forces over the next 48 hours under the terms of the joint operational plan. End Note). He said that Rwanda had been told the extension was due in part to local leaders in North Kivu having informed Kabila that continuing the joint operation would reduce the prospect of the FDLR reasserting control of key locations. There was also a concern that FDLR members and their supporters would stop seeking demobilization and repatriation assistance. Nyamvumba said that RDF Chief of Defense Staff General James Kabarebe, would return to Kigali this evening. (We will seek to touch base with him tomorrow.)

¶3. (C) Nyamvumba conceded there were other RDF forces in the theater of operation, in addition to the battalions engaged in operations and on reserve. These others include three companies of special forces and military intelligence officers. He dismissed rumors that there were significantly higher numbers of RDF forces across the border than the RDF had previously reported to us. Nyamvumba said the troops had been provisioned with adequate supplies of ammunition and medicines for only two weeks. He will be moving in additional supplies to cover the next three weeks, requirements. He confirmed the FARDC had serious

organizational challenges meeting RDF first-line logistic support requirements.

¶4. (C) Nyamvumba asked whether the U.S. had agreed to President Kabila's request to place "U.S. military observers" inside the JOC. We replied that we would relay that question. Nyamvumba reported that Kabarebe told him that President Kabila said he planned to ask the U.S. if it were willing to serve as a third-party observer in the JOC to provide independent assessments of how the joint operation was proceeding. Kabarebe replied that Rwanda "had no problem" with the U.S. -- or even the French -- being in the JOC if Kabila thought it important.

¶5. (C) Nyamvumba assessed "Phase One" as having been successful to date in terms of building confidence at the political level between the two governments and militaries. He said Rwanda was sensitive to the political risks the joint operation posed to Kabila, which is why Rwanda continued not to do any public affairs messaging on the joint operation, leaving that field to the DRC. On the military side, he said, operations have gone smoothly, but he added that integrating National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) troops and Pareco supporters into the FARDC was not an easy task.

¶6. (C) On February 4, Nyamvumba said a large number of FDLR troops and several officers, asked to participate in the MONUC demobilization program. This followed over 500 other FDLR family members and supporters turning themselves in over the course of the past two weeks. (Comment. Significant additional FDLR, family members and supporters may seek demobilization and repatriation assistance in the days ahead.

It is vitally important that MONUC have adequate resources to ensure their successful transition and transfer to Rwanda.

End Comment.)

¶7. (C) Nyamvumba indicated that there had been a small number of skirmishes, but no RDF casualties. After the conclusion of Phase One (now at the end of February), Nyamvumba said the next step would be an assessment of the results to determine if all objectives in North Kivu had been met before moving into the South Kivu.

¶8. (C) Counteracting the rumors about CNDP General Laurent Nkunda's whereabouts, Nyamvumba asserted that Nkunda remained under strict control at his house in Gisenyi. He added Nkunda had no access to telephones -- "otherwise, we'd be hearing his voice on Al Jazeera."

¶9. (C) Beyond the joint operation, GOR-DRC relations continue to move ahead with another round of the "four-plus-four" discussions now taking place in Gisenyi on February 5-6. This round will be the last for Rwandan Great Lakes Special Envoy Joseph Mutaboba who will be leaving Rwanda for Guinea-Bissau where he will serve as the UN Secretary General's special representative. (Ref B) Mutaboba told Ambassador tonight that the today's talks continued to be very positive, we will provide a read-out of the meeting as soon as possible.

¶10. (C) In Rwanda, there has been no public discussion of the DRC operation by senior officials, other than a passing mention by the President shortly after the operation began that highlighted the importance of DRC-Rwandan cooperation. February 1, at the annual commemoration event for Rwanda's heros, President Kagame made no mention of the joint operation or relations with the DRC. Instead, he focused his comments on economic growth, anti-corruption, and improved services by government and private sector workers. He added it was up to Rwandans to work themselves free of dependence on foreign assistance as he has done repeatedly.

¶11. (C) Comment. The request that the RDF remain in eastern Congo was widely expected here. It is a sign that progress is being made in rooting out the FDLR and recognition that such progress benefits both the DRC and

Rwanda. Rwandans continue to assert that they will not overstay their welcome in the DRC and appear genuine in recognizing the difficult situation President Kabila confronts domestically. End Comment.

SYMINGTON